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THE PLACE OF THE FAMILY SERVICE AGENCY IN THE MENTAL HEALTH MOVEMENT

A Statement Authorized by the Board of Directors  
Family Service Association of America  
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The family is society's basic bulwark for the mental health of its members, and the Family Service agency with its casework counseling is a basic mental health resource. Through its counseling service the Family Service agency identifies problems of emotional disturbance and early symptoms of mental illness, helps family members to cope with overwhelming stress, treats problems of individual and social maladjustment, and prepares family members for psychiatric care when needed.

The 1961 Report of the Joint Commission on Mental Illness and Health specifically cites the family casework agency as a strong advocate of sound family life and as an essential resource in rendering service. A major recommendation of the Report states: "Persons who are emotionally disturbed --that is to say, under psychological stress that they cannot tolerate --should have skilled attention and helpful counseling available to them in their community if the development of more serious mental breakdown is to be prevented. This is known as secondary prevention, and is concerned with the detection of beginning signs and symptoms of mental illness and their relief: in other words, the earliest possible treatment." Family Service staff members provide this type of skilled counseling service.

Currently there are 310 accredited Family Service agencies with approximately 2800 professional social workers on their staffs located in 270 communities. These agencies, backed by strong citizen boards and supported by United Funds, and other voluntary contributions, are committed to high standards of service. They provide family counseling and related services and are charged with responsibility "to contribute to harmonious family interrelationships, to strengthen the positive values in family life, and to promote healthy personality development and satisfactory functioning of various family members."

The concern of Congress, expressed in its generous support of numerous programs offered through the National Institute on Mental Health and, currently, the comprehensive mental health planning to be done state by state exemplify the present push. Several states have councils of Family Service agencies which can act on state-wide planning matters. Spokesmen from a number of them have been appointed to the official state body charged with developing a comprehensive mental health plan. This kind of action is appropriate, in the judgment of the FSAA Board.

New Jersey has set a fine example in coordinating the efforts of family service agencies and mental health clinics. The report of a New Jersey conference held on December 12-15, 1962, is available under the title, "Cooperation Toward Mental Health - A Conference of Community Psychiatric Clinics and Family Service Agencies." The Association is urging that similar conferences be held in other states.

The Family Service Association of America's Board of Directors has authorized a special committee to promote the Family Service movement's contribution to the development of better community mental health resources. It has also authorized this statement to clarify the position of the Association and its accredited Member Agencies in the mental health movement.